

# Hispanic Heritage Spotlight

## Bridging Communities

### SANDY MONTES GRUBER'S JOURNEY

As the Director of Community Outreach for [Melanin Minded LLC](#), Sandy Montes Gruber understands the vital role of dementia education within minority communities, working to bridge the gap between information services and support for people of color. Melanin Minded not only offers consultations and dementia education for families, but their Navigator Transportation service, equipped with specially trained drivers, ensures safe and comfortable travel for individuals in the early stages of dementia and helps to combat isolation. "Our goal is to ensure that these individuals are still a part of the community," Sandy emphasizes. "We want to ensure that they aren't isolated and don't fall into depression because they feel like they have to stay at home or rely on family members."

Sandy is also involved in the Bridge Youth Program, an initiative conceived by Melanin Minded LLC founder Dr. Bashir Easter. The program empowers minority youth who often serve as what Bashir calls "invisible caregivers" within their families. Sandy observes, "In communities of color, we care for Grandma and Grandpa or Mom and Dad without asking why." Through specialized training, these caregivers gain valuable skills to support their loved ones while understanding the nuances of dementia. The program's impact extends beyond education and, in some cases, has directly facilitated employment opportunities for its graduates.



Sandy Montes Gruber (left) and her twin sister, Nancy Montes Rodrigues (right)

Sandy's advocacy grew out of her early experiences as a care manager, where she worked closely with the elderly Latino community. A significant portion of her clients faced various forms of dementia. Her journey with the Alzheimer's Association began in 2016 when she joined the Young Champions group, a platform for young professionals to advocate and raise awareness. In 2017, she also began volunteering for the Alzheimer's Association Gala.

Sandy's perspective shifted dramatically when her father received a diagnosis in 2021. "In hindsight, I feel like this was God's way of preparing me for what awaited me ahead," she recalls. Despite her experience working with individuals living with dementia, the emotional impact of her father's diagnosis was profound. "You feel like you're prepared, but you're not," she says. Sandy sees her advocacy work, especially within the minority Latino community, as her calling and purpose, urging her to "take action and combat the stigma associated with Alzheimer's in our community."

Along with her advocacy work, Sandy is documenting her father's life story. "I want my children, nieces, and nephews to understand who their grandpa is," she says. "My ultimate objective is to write a book about his journey immigrating to the US from Mexico and my family's journey in caring for him."

Sandy's involvement with the Walk Committee for the Walk to End Alzheimer's – Washington County is a testament to her dedication. Last year, as a new stay-at-home mom, she recognized the opportunity to become involved with the Walk Committee and connect with its members. Her enthusiasm and commitment have not gone unnoticed, as she will take on the role of Co-chair in the coming year. She hopes that this will allow her to foster deeper connections with businesses and community leaders.

Sandy's story of transformation, purpose, and advocacy in the face of difficulty shows us that personal experiences combined with professional knowledge can lead to a profound understanding. Her work continues to break down stigmas, raise awareness, and inspire hope for families navigating Alzheimer's and other dementia.

